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Bite-Sized Training™: Mentoring Skills

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Bite-Sized Training™:

Mentoring Skills

*A lot of people have gone further than they thought they could,
because someone else thought they could. – Unknown*

Mentoring is a relationship. It is also a journey. On this expedition are two people. One person believes in the other's talents and is committed to that person's success. The other is willing and open to learning, and growing, and becoming the best they can.

Both stand to get a lot from the relationship. And, as with any interpersonal journey, there are challenges. Effective mentoring involves being able to find your way around the challenges and take advantage of the many opportunities that await.

Yet, while some people think that good mentoring is just “something that happens” or only comes to those who are lucky enough to find the right mentor, in fact mentoring is a skill that can be learned and developed.

Good mentoring comes from being aware of what it takes to enter into a mentoring relationship. A genuine desire for success and a clear commitment to the process are necessary. When done well, mentoring is great for improving the productivity and effectiveness of the people involved. It's not a matter of luck, and there are many tools that you can use to build meaningful mentoring relationships.

In this **Bite-Sized Training™** session you'll be introduced to some of these tools. You'll also be given a chance to start thinking about what place mentoring can have in your own professional life. In the next hour, the exercises and notes will help you:

1. Understand how you have benefited from mentoring in the past.
2. Determine what you have to offer as a mentor.
3. Formulate a mentoring plan for professional development.
4. Create a mentoring agreement.

Share your thoughts and experience, or ask any questions of your Mind Tools' trainer at the Bite-Sized Training™ forum, by replying to the posting for this lesson. Just visit the “Bite-Sized Training: Mentoring Skills” thread of the Bite-Sized Training forum here <http://www.mindtools.com/forums/viewtopic.php?t=2129>.

1. Understanding How You've Benefited From Mentoring

A mentoring relationship is typically characterized by an older and more experienced person assisting a younger and/or less experienced person to grow and learn. This is not a new concept for personal and professional growth and development. It has been practiced formally and informally for years.

Mentoring is an efficient way of developing talented people within your organization, of supporting professional goals, and sharing skills in a mutually beneficial partnership.

Effective mentoring focuses on the human relationships, commitments, and resources needed to help a less experienced person find success and fulfillment in their professional pursuits. Mentors are not power figures. They are not authoritarian in their approach.

Rather, a mentor is someone who helps someone else learn something quicker and more thoroughly than if that person is left to discover things on his or her own.

Mentoring in the workplace is an idea that has been practiced both formally and informally for decades, and, in both forms, its power as a medium for developing talented people has been well proven.

Recognizing this, organizations developed formal mentoring programs as a way of encouraging and promoting the movement of women and minorities into leadership positions. From these somewhat partisan beginnings, workplace mentoring moved to a position where it is now a mainstream activity, designed to assist all employees in their personal and professional development.

Some mentors are encouragers, some are advisors, and some are more like teachers. Regardless of style, mentoring requires a significant investment of time and energy to helping another grow. One of the best ways to discover the mentor in you is to examine the various mentoring experiences you have had in the past.

These can have occurred in a variety of ways. Mentoring may be a one-shot intervention or a long-term relationship. It may have been developed formally or it can happen in an informal setting. However, when you've been "touched" by a mentor, you know it.

Formal mentoring happens when a specific relationship is established with a senior person. Often this is to teach new skills or to groom someone for future roles and responsibilities.

Informal mentoring can come from an ongoing relationship, where one person listens, helps discuss problems, and shares special knowledge or wisdom.

To understand how you yourself have benefited from mentoring, reflect on your own experiences by answering these questions:

- What kind of mentoring did you receive?
- How did it compare to the mentoring received by people around you?

- What did you find helpful and unhelpful about the mentoring you received?
- How well did the mentoring you received apply to your professional and/or personal success?
- How well did your mentors prepare you for your career?
- What other kinds of mentoring would have been helpful to you?

The answers to these questions may help you to define the kind of mentor you want to be and identify the building blocks for developing productive mentoring relationships with others.

Action: Consider significant events and people in your life. Think about these in terms of mentoring and then answer the following questions.

Have You Been Mentored?

Have you had an “ah ha” moment in your life? Who was there to help you make the discovery? How did this person impact your life and in what way could he/she be considered a mentor?

Has someone ever quoted something or said something to you that was profound that you've carried the meaning with you ever since? Who is the person? Would you consider this person a mentor? Why or why not? What mentoring qualities did you learn from this person?

Is there a person who helped you uncover a latent talent, ability, or desire? How did this person encourage you and help you with your discovery? How has this impacted your life and your mentoring vision?

2. Becoming a Mentor

Good mentoring rarely “just happens”. It develops from reflection, planning, and an understanding of your unique qualities as a mentor. Just as other people mentored you in different ways, you will mentor others in your unique way.

It is important to remember that effective mentoring, like wisdom itself, is multidimensional. The best mentors adjust their role to meet the mentee’s needs. There is no single formula for good mentoring, however, there are key characteristics and behaviors that build a foundation for good mentoring. These are:

- Approachability – let your mentees know you are interested and available. Share personal information and relate to them. It will be particularly helpful to them to know that they can come to you, and that you will care.
- Information sharing – be willing to share openly, and establish a pattern of mutual information exchange. Encourage them to try new things and expand their own knowledge base.
- Open communication – find ways to make sure contact is regular and meaningful.
- Trustworthiness – ensure your mentees feel free to discuss issues with you without fear of reprisal.
- Respect – let the mentee know you respect their time and opinions. Share what you learn from them. Acknowledge their skills and progress.
- Appropriate feedback – let your mentees know how you feel in a respectful and gentle manner. Timely, assertive, empathic, and honest communication is important.
- Technical expertise – remain up to date and current with your own knowledge.
- Supportiveness – work on being motivating, encouraging, positive and empowering.
- Commitment – invest enough time in the relationship, and mentor regularly.
- Desire to help – make sure you are truly interested in helping someone else, without a promise of help in return.

Coaching versus mentoring

These terms are often used interchangeably when in fact they are key differences. Mentoring is much more relational whereas coaching is functional.

You coach to teach a skill and improve current productivity and performance.

Mentoring takes on a longer term and broader focus. It’s not limited to current performance or current activities. The focus of mentoring is more on preparing a person for future challenges and giving him or her life skills as well as technical skills. Essentially a mentor may also coach, however a coach is not a mentor.

These qualities tell your mentee that he or she is valuable enough for you to spend time with, that you will be honest with him or her, and that you are engaged in and supportive of his or her development and success. All are powerful messages that will help your mentee get through challenges and emerge better, stronger, and more capable.

Mentoring is also very much a two-way street. It is a process in which both mentor and mentee benefit from the networking, sharing of ideas and interaction that can lead to lifelong friendship and mutual growth.

Action: Think about your interest in being a mentor, and answer the following questions:

Why Do You Want To Mentor?

What characteristics do you possess that make you a good mentor or potential mentor?

What benefits do you believe you will gain from a mentoring relationship?

(If a mentoring relationship won't give you benefits that you need, either for yourself or for an important member of your team, then that's a useful thing to know!)

3. Planning to Mentor

As you start to enter into a mentoring relationship with someone, it's useful to clarify your goals and expectations. For this to be a mutually rewarding experience, you should have a good idea of how the relationship will work. Of course as the relationship grows you will likely revisit your original assumptions, however having a place to start is useful.

Issues to consider when thinking about your expectations include:

Why do you want to be a mentor?

- It's a way to "give back".
- Provide encouragement and support to someone else?
- Establish a close relationship?
- Challenge yourself to learn new things?
- Pass on knowledge?
- Further develop your network?

What do you expect to discuss, explore, and provide?

- Career options and preparation?
- Your own work?
- Technical issues?
- How to network?
- How to maintain a balance in work and life?
- How to identify and fulfill personal dreams?
- Workplace realities?
- Help securing a job: opportunities, networking, interviews, resume critique, etc...?

What are the rules of the relationship?

- Complete confidentiality?
- Sharing personal details?
- Meeting places?
- Meeting times?
- Time commitments?

Reverse mentoring is the practice of executives pumping younger staff for their wisdom. What makes the younger generation tick? What technologies should be used to tap into younger people's thinking and behavior? Reverse mentoring is an efficient way to bridge the generation gaps in organizations. It leads to significant insights and increased performance. It's also a great opportunity for younger workers to connect with the company and enhance their level of engagement and commitment.

Action: Think of a person you might consider mentoring, and detail your expectations about how the relationship may work. Use the questions above as a starting point for thinking about this.

Mentoring Expectations
Why do you want to mentor?
What will you discuss, explore, and provide?

What rules do you want to operate?

To remain accountable in your mentoring relationship and ensure your mutual goals and expectations are met, you may want to consider creating a formal mentoring agreement. Here you outline the objectives as well as any rules and expectations you want documented.

A mentoring agreement may include:

- Specific objectives
- Confidentiality statement.
- Meeting frequency
- Meeting format (face to face, phone, Internet, etc.)
- Duration of mentoring relationship
- Voluntary termination of agreement statement.

We show a template for this on the next page.

I, _____ and _____
are voluntarily entering into a mentoring relationship. To this end we have agreed on
the following:

Objectives:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Confidentiality:

Issues discussed are assumed to be held in confidence unless otherwise stated. When
an issue is deemed appropriate to discuss with an outside party, a note will be made of
the arrangement for further clarification and future reference.

Meeting Frequency and Mode:

Meetings will take place at least _____ times per _____. The meeting formats will
include: _____, _____ and _____.

Duration:

This mentoring relationship will continue as long as we both feel comfortable or until

Other Rules and Expectations:

Should one of us decide to terminate this agreement for any reason, he/she is free to
do so. We agree to abide by one another's decision.

Mentor

Mentee

Date

Date

4. Empowered Mentoring

Once you begin mentoring it is important that you maintain the momentum of the relationship and still respect the boundaries. It's easy to get too involved and want to solve your mentee's problems. You need to remember that you are there to support, not "do".

The best mentoring is a process rather than an event. As a mentor you are providing guidance so that mentees can solve their own problems and develop in their own way. You are empowering them with knowledge and not simply passing on what you know.

You want to encourage them to take responsibility for achieving their goals. This means giving them time and space to complete their tasks on their own. Be prepared and available to provide more advice and counsel as they near completion and resist the temptation to do it for them.

Remember that the most valuable lessons often come from making mistakes, so let your mentees fall down occasionally, just as long as this isn't too damaging. Then, encourage them to get back up again, and find a better way to reach their goal.

As a way to build confidence, find areas where they can prove their success, and help them showcase their accomplishments to others. Not only does this expose them to other professionals, it helps them build their own network of people to consult.

Learning to ask great questions is a valuable skill for a mentor. It pushes the mentee to think for himself or herself, and it encourages more comprehensive discussions. You can learn some great questioning techniques at:

http://www.mindtools.com/community/pages/article/newTMC_88.php

Similarly, where you've identified things that need to be worked on or achieved, goal setting is an important and effective technique to use to effect change. Find out more at:

<http://www.mindtools.com/community/pages/article/page6.php>

(You'll find many more useful articles on Goal Setting in the "Goal Setting" submenu of the "Manage Time" menu on the members' home page.)

And structuring your meetings around specific issues is a great way to ensure your mentee is benefiting from the relationship in meaningful and measurable ways. To make the most of any mentoring relationship, make sure to have thoughtful discussions with your mentees and ask them what they need from you to navigate their professional experience, and achieve their goals and objectives.

Key Learning Points

Mentoring is a valuable exercise for all involved. It's an effective means of training and development and it contributes to a significant, positive impact on the way in which personal and professional goals are achieved. Learning through mentoring is instant and the information received has the value of being tried and true, tested in the trenches.

Mentors impart knowledge gained from years of experience, mentees learn invaluable lessons, and they both learn from one another in a mutually satisfying way.

Preparing for a great mentoring relationship by examining your own mentoring experiences is an important first step. When followed by a close examination and agreement of expectations and goals, the relationship has the potential to propel both parties to achieve outcomes they had not previously imagined.

Share Your Bite-Sized Learning

Now go back to the Bite-Sized Training Forum, and share your thoughts, tips and experience, or ask any questions of your Mind Tools' trainer. Simply reply to the posting for this lesson at the following URL:

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